

CRITICAL ELECTIONS IN ENGLAND.

The following article from the November number of the *Whig Magazine*, on "Critical Elections" in the past history of England, will be read with interest, even by American readers, who are watching with eagerness the progress of the present contest in England:

"The writing of the contradictory results of the elections of 1660 and of the general election of 1710, Lord Stanhope observes, with something less than his usual peripety, 'How strange and sudden are the veerings of popular favor! Some grounds have elsewhere been given that will partly account for these revulsions; but to explain them altogether on anything like reason, or without a Hostal allowance for the caprice of popular favor, would, I believe, be difficult.' The contradiction as to what the wind should blow from the North to-day, and from the South to-morrow." It appears to us, on the con rare, that these revulsions of feeling are often more apparent than real, and that beneath the superficial instability of public opinion which the historians relate, the operations of a uniform principle may generally be traced. Even where this is not the case, such oscillations of popular feeling as Lord Stanhope is describing are not from the physical or irrational. In many particular instances while the electors they represented the popularity and indecision of the entire nation, swaying doubtfully between the two theories of government, and inclining to one or the other as the circumstances of the moment swayed them. Such was pre-eminently the condition of the English people during the forty years that passed away between the deposition of King James II and the death of King George I. While the memory of the Stuarts was still strong, and the old principles known to all, the old mystic loyalty, though sometimes eclipsed, was never eradicated from the hearts of men; and maintained a nearly equal struggle with the national common sense of government and the national dislike of Popery, which formed the mainstay of the Jacobite party. But as this generation gradually died off, and new ones arose with whom Jacobinism was either a mere theory or a stark reminiscence of past events, the old principles gave way, and disappeared altogether before the nomination of Sir Robert Walpole. Vestiges of the old sentiment still lingered in this country, and were more vigorous in Scotland, but as a practical influence determining the result of elections and deciding the fate of ministers, it was obsolete and powerless. Nothing similar to that period of transition has subsequently occurred in England; and we have, accordingly, no similar instances to record of popular revulsions. But the revolutions which did occur within the period may be accounted for on the grounds above given, even were there no others by which some of them at least may be adequately explained. In giving a brief account of the "critical elections" which have taken place in England from the reign of Queen Anne to the present day—meaning by "critical elections" such as have decided either the fate of the parties or the fortunes of celebrated ministers—we shall begin with the general election of 1710, which to some extent deserves the name of a critical election, inasmuch as the political situation of these popular revolutions which we have quoted. In April, 1708, the majority returned to the House of Commons had been a Whig majority. The Whig Ministers were the popular Ministers of the day. The Duke of Marlborough was the idol of the nation. The Protestant succession was now a man dated publicly. In September, 1709, the Queen was in a position to dismiss her Ministry, to insult the Duke, to call men to her council who were adverse to the Protestant succession, and succeeded in expelling the Whigs from the government and appeal to the country with an assurance of triumph. No doubt the popular mind had been highly inflamed against the Whigs by the impeachment of Sacheverell. A High church "cry" had been got up, which was all to the advantage of the Tories. But neither cry nor "cavil" in our eyes, sufficient to explain the entire change of mind which the constitutions then displayed.

It was tolerably well known in the country that the sympathy of the people, in spite of her alliance with the Whigs, was to be with the exiles at St. Germains; and the knowledge was by no means to her detriment. In the missing Sunderland and Godolphin, and replacing them by Oxford and Bolingbroke, she was supposed to be exercising her own independent will, and to be vindicating the dignity of the crown. Now, curious as it may seem, it appears to us beyond a doubt that multitudes of people who would have voted at arbitrary power and cheered at parliamentary government, did not do so, but abstained from voting, with regard with approval the assertion of the royal prerogative. The truth we suspect to be, that the decay of the political action on which monarchy is based in this kingdom is rather thrown away upon the multitude. They like to see a king or queen do something, partly because they think the weaker of the crown ought to do something; partly because a royal act, proceeding from the breast of Majesty in virtue of some unmechanical power, and not visibly connected with any real exertion of the royal prerogative, was to be preferred to a royal act, which only the concluding act of the drama began in '14; and the final result proved that though the Minister had lost his popularity, the revolution at which the country had arrived in 1710 was still dominant in England. Shortly after the last-mentioned year the coalition between Jacobin and "Guelphism" had begun to sap the roots of the Whig administration, which had hitherto been upheld by the Whigs themselves, and the party of the Tories, which was the vanguard of the Whig cause, had become the most powerful party in the country. The Whig Ministers were the popular Ministers of the day. The Duke of Marlborough was the idol of the nation. The Protestant succession was now a man dated publicly. In September, 1709, the Queen was in a position to dismiss her Ministry, to insult the Duke, to call men to her council who were adverse to the Protestant succession, and succeeded in expelling the Whigs from the government and appeal to the country with an assurance of triumph. No doubt the popular mind had been highly inflamed against the Whigs by the impeachment of Sacheverell. A High church "cry" had been got up, which was all to the advantage of the Tories. But neither cry nor "cavil" in our eyes, sufficient to explain the entire change of mind which the constitutions then displayed.

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We have now to take a considerable leap in advance before we come to another election which deserves the title of "critical." After the death of George II the nation was gradually converted to Toryism by the character and conduct of his successor, who, whatever he might appear to those who had opportunities of knowing him, to the great mass of the people was an object of execration. The "Jacobite" of the Tories, during alike from Jacobites, Pelham, or Eltonites—had their chance, fought their battle, and lost it, and from that time forth ceased to exist as a substantive power in the State. The election of 1741 accomplished one-half of their original design, and overthrew Walpole; but it brought no advantage to themselves. Within three years of the great Opposition triumph, a steady, old-fashioned Whig government, slightly reinforced by the "Patriots," was again in office under Henry Pelham, who retained power till his death, eleven years afterwards, and bequeathed it to his party for another twelve or fifteen years.

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Undoubtedly Fox's India bill created great alarm in certain quarters; and the gallantry of Mr. Pitt had enlisted the sympathies of the people. But no special causes were required to produce the great Tory majority which was the result of the election. The electors of 1741 were the electors of 1710, and the electors of 1780. They had returned a large Tory majority on the two first occasions, and why should they not again? Though many of the old Tory party in the House of Commons, who had supported the ministry of Sir Robert Peel, the people were not in the least going back from the principles they had adopted in the Reform Bill. Wiser and more experienced than his predecessors, he still substantially carried out their system of government. There was, indeed, nothing distinctive in the "Conservative party" which the election of 1841 brought into power, as there had been in the Tory party of Mr. Pitt, and the Whig party of Lord Grey. And the best proof of it is that power very soon bid back again into the old hands. What we mean is, that the appeal to the country in '14 produced as great and as lasting a change as the appeal of 1710; and that the Ministry of Sir Robert Peel was no real break in the continuity of the political system which had prevailed ever since. On the surface, indeed, the election of 1841 was easily attributable to the "Conservative party," but it was not so. It is probable that the election of 1841 will be the first intimation to the series?

We have already stated our opinion that the result of it will not depend exclusively on the Irish Church question. Votes will be given for the Liberals by men not hostile to that church.

Votes will be given for the Conservatives by men who disapprove of that church. A broader question than that will virtually be submitted to the people, and that is, whether they will vote for the Conservative party, or for the Liberal party.

They had returned a large Tory majority in 1780, and it was evident, both to the country and the House of Commons, and not the result of any sudden "revision of feeling" or special appeal to the constituencies. The general election of 1780 is remarkable rather for having shown that although the House of Commons had described the principles on which it was returned, the people were still true to them. The Parliament which was dissolved in 1780 had been elected in 1780, when it was found, contrary to the expectations of the Opposition, that the Whigs had made out a majority, and that Lord North's ministry was little, if at all, diminished. In other words, the House of Commons in which the Coalition Ministry was formed against the Whig party, was the very same House of Commons which had been elected to support the King. Is it to be wondered at, therefore, that on the first appeal to the people the Coalition was scattered to the winds? It has often seemed to us that this memorable election had been a good deal misinterpreted.

The elections of 1713—for these were the days of triennial parliaments—made little change in the relative strength of parties. But with the spring of 1716 the new dynasty was on the throne, and an appeal was made to the people to confirm the Act of Settlement, and endorse the policy of the Whigs in placing the Elector of Hanover on the throne. The Whigs, however, were the popular sentiment only three years before, the appeal was entirely successful. A large majority was returned in favor of revolution principles; and with permanent results as important as those which we have assigned to the election just described. Parliamentary government, Protestant principles, and the German alliance, the three constituents of English history for at least a century and a half, was then firmly established.

Probably there has been no election in our annals, if we except 1861, when the dominant party in Parliament met with so complete and so sudden a chastisement at the hands of the people, as they did at the period in question.

One hundred and sixty supporters of the

Coalition lost their seats; and it was

doubtful for a time whether even Mr. Fox would be re-elected for Westminster. The aristocratic interest in Yorkshire, which, in the pointed language of Macaulay, had made the county like a Whig borough, was beaten out of the field by Mr. Wilberforce. Mr. Pitt came in at the head of the poll for the University of Cambridge. The discontent, which in 1710, in 1716, and in 1780, was manifested in the election of 1784, the decisive and permanent effects of which are well known to be repeated. It seated the Tories in office for 48 years, and Mr. Pitt, with a brief intermission, for his life.

And it was not until a new generation had grown up, and new ideas and new wants taken possession of the public mind, that the Whigs recovered from the blow. Thus we see that the four critical elections of the last century were in 1710, in 1716, in 1780, and in 1784. The first three are easily compared to the last. The first two, the Whigs and the Tories, but in none of the three which involved great and sudden changes do we observe any agency at work which can properly be called caprice. Both in 1710 and 1784 the people were really glad to see the royal prerogative exerted; and we have pointed out the reasons which they had for believing that it was, in one instance at least, exerted on the right side. But no one who studies attentively the history of the eighteenth century can fail to perceive that the independence of the Crown was always a favorite idea with the English people, and that the hunting of the Whigs was capable of uniting with effect the thrifid of his gracious sovereign, and his own loyal resolve to assist in the work of emancipation, was certain of vigorous applause. This sentiment was at the bottom of the Tory success both in 1710 and in 1784. The Whig victories, on the other hand, were owing to two equally deeply rooted sentiments in the English mind—the dread of Popery and the pride which accompanied the assumption of the royal prerogative. The former to the French, and for that would have cost William his throne, and although the avowed Jacobites felt that nothing could be done without French assistance, the very necessity discredited the cause in the eyes of the nation at large.

The next really critical election that we have to record brings us down to a period within the memory of middle-aged men, and is likely to be the last of our contemporary history.

Again, in 1784, the whole twenty years previous, that followed the nomination of the Regent, the Whigs and the friends of Prince Charles Edward; but the cause had lost its hold upon the nation, and no longer in any appreciable degree influenced elections.

In 1784 there was an appeal to the constituency by the Opposition and the Government, such as we are now accustomed to, upon general questions of policy, and without, as far as we can learn, any fact referring even to the exiled family. The Opposition was a success of success. They had won the election of 1780, and the election of 1784 was a success of that. The "revision of feeling" which occurred in 1784 took place after a period of six years, during which Ministers had been elected because they were honest in bisons and dandies, and dealt out strict, and when the members of the House of Commons who had been elected because they were Jacobites might have been counted on one's fingers. Not that an extensive Jacobite conspiracy did not exist in England during those twenty years previous, that helped to bring about the nomination of the Regent, and the landing of Prince Charles Edward; but the cause had lost its hold upon the nation, and no longer in any appreciable degree influenced elections.

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